

## Remarks of Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren to the Commonwealth Club of Silicon Valley

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Washington, DC – Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren (D-San Jose) addressed the Commonwealth Club of San Jose on Homeland Security issues. The full text of Congresswoman Lofgren's statement is listed below:

"Thank you for inviting me here today. It is a pleasure to spend time with the Commonwealth Club of Silicon Valley and to see so many long time friends.

"Because it's a question on everyone's mind, I'd like to update you on the latest from Washington on Homeland Security. Renewed violence has put homeland security issues back on the front pages of newspapers across the country. With the recent bombings in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, and the President's decision to raise the nation's threat level to Orange, it sometimes feels September 11, 2001 was 20 days, not 20 months ago. As I left Washington last Friday, a military anti-aircraft missile battery was positioned on a hill next to the Washington Monument, and air patrols had resumed over the District. The Capitol Police, with machine guns, watch over the Congress as we cross the street to vote.

"Is America actually safer than it was on September 10, 2001? Have we accurately and comprehensively identified the threats? Have we reduced our vulnerabilities? Is the nation sufficiently prepared to prevent and respond to future terrorist attacks? Unfortunately, I believe the answer to these questions is, for the most part, no.

"Why do we still feel so unsafe? This is a question we ask ourselves. After all, the President has received everything he has asked for to fight the war on terrorism. Congress approved the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. It passed budgets to pay for domestic security initiatives, never denying a financial request. It even authorized the war on Iraq because the President claimed Saddam Hussein and his regime were a major threat to the US. But still we have doubts about our safety, and last week's order that the threat level be raised to Orange confirms that we are still not secure. Why?

"There is a sense in the land that we are not fully aware of the situation. It's worth noting that the President's rhetoric has not always reflected reality, a fact that may contribute to the national unease. During the President's now famous visit to the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln, the President claimed that we have seen "the turning of the tide" in the war on terrorism and that "our nation is more secure." Let me remind you, that speech was delivered less than a month ago - on May 1, 2003. Just in the past week, the US intelligence community has reported on increased 'chatter' among shady terrorist circles, and yet another message from an Al Qaeda leader calling for new attacks against the US and its interests.

"Last week, a reporter asked Ari Fleischer about the President's claim about the tide turning in the war on terrorism. Fleischer responded, 'tides have a way of coming in and going out.' A funny line, but the situation is dead serious. We are not, I believe, significantly less vulnerable than we were on September 10, 2001.

"I serve on the Select Committee on Homeland Security, and I am the top Democrat on the Cybersecurity Subcommittee. Since being appointed to the Committee earlier this year, people everywhere ask me about how we have progressed and what the committee and department are doing to keep us safe. In fact, the full committee waited nearly 100 days to actually have Secretary Tom Ridge come before us. Then a flurry of activity. Last week I attended no less than four different Homeland Security committee meetings. Secretary Tom Ridge testified before the committee twice. I thought I should take a minute to give you my impressions of our nation's security based on these meetings.

"By all appearances, Tom Ridge is a nice, well-intentioned fellow. He comes across as both calm and in charge. In fact, his public relations staff work hard to make Ridge a reassuring presence for the public. The Washington Post wrote a long profile piece on Ridge last week. In the piece an aide said 'When people see him, we want them to think, 'My babies are safe.'

"I spent a combined 5 hours last week watching Ridge testify, and his rhetoric was reassuring. Once again though, a top administration official's rhetoric did not reflect reality. Time and again, Members of the Homeland Security Committee addressed serious gaps in our domestic security. Secretary Ridge wisely acknowledged the problems but only responded by saying he would look into them.

"My colleague Ed Markey of Massachusetts questioned Ridge about cargo on passenger aircraft. According to the General Accounting Office, 22 percent of all the cargo that is shipped by air is transported aboard passenger aircraft. Currently, the Department of Homeland Security does not screen this cargo prior to loading on passenger airplanes. Instead, the Department relies on reviews of the paperwork accompanying the cargo, rather than on inspections of the cargo itself, in order to gauge the potential threat it may pose to passengers on the aircraft. The lack of a comprehensive cargo screening policy creates a gaping hole in the nation's security strategy. The percentage of all cargo that is actually screened, whether it is subsequently loaded aboard planes or transported via other means, is estimated to be only about 2 percent. Ridge promised 'to look into the matter.'

"Congressman Peter DeFazio of Oregon brought up the issue of airport employees not being required to pass through a metal detector before reporting to work. These employees file through airport security by simply flashing a photo ID. Ridge mentioned that the Department is working on a Transportation Worker Identification Card and that he will report back to the committee, 'looking into it' again.

"It's not only Democrats who brought issues to Ridge's attention. Congressman Harold Rogers, a Republican who chairs the appropriations subcommittee on Homeland Security, asked Ridge about a story in the Los Angeles Times, indicating that more than 24 screeners at the Los Angeles Airport have been found to have criminal records and at least 50 at New York's JFK Airport. Ridge said that the Department was reviewing its own process of background checks of TSA screeners and, again, that he would 'look into it.'

"I asked about the deplorable state of technology at the Department, and specifically in the parts of the department that make up the old INS.

"The challenge in this area is to sort accurately. Keep out who we don't want and let in those we do.

"A recent Business Week article stated that increased security checks for foreign students entering the US have caused 'massive disruptions for legitimate scholars, especially in science and engineering.' The article goes on to state that 53%, let me repeat, 53%, of US universities said they had students who missed the fall semester because of visa roadblocks.

"Unfortunately, this is not a problem that exists only among foreign students. There are countless stories I can tell you about business leaders, even CEO's, top-notch researchers and professors - all legitimate visitors to our country - that have experienced not just minor inconveniences in the visa process, but also outright denials and extremely lengthy clearance processes, some lasting ten months or longer. The Scientific community is concerned we will lose some of the shine in cutting edge technology and scientific discovery around the country. From what I am hearing, our schools, research institutions, and businesses are already experiencing disruptions that are effectively slowing or even shutting down research programs and precluding business deals.

"Now why is this? We learned that today, coming up on two years after 9/11 we still have not unified the 'watch lists' prepared by our intelligence agencies. We still have not deployed technology to sort databases for those seeking visas, we still lack biometrics to confirm that an applicant is who he or she purports to be. The latest proposal is to innovate! Yes, to initiate taking pictures of visa applicants... an old, but not very reliable sort of 'biometric.' Sadly, we have yet to even set the parameters for which biometrics will be deployed.

"One of the big challenges the world faces is to secure the plutonium in the former Soviet Union. The CEO of the Commonwealth Club, Gloria Duffy, is an expert in this subject having run this program during some of the Clinton Presidency. The effort is now lagging and needs to improve.

"Recently, the United States invited a Russian scientist to the United States for a program about better security for this dangerous material. What a great idea - except that the visa didn't come through in time to allow the scientist we invited

to actually come here.

"Ridge agreed that this is a problem and said he had been meeting with Secretary Colin Powell to try to decrease the clearance time on visas. I suppose this is a good thing that he is talking to Powell, but what is required is the systematic deployment of technology and the organization of the information available to us so that it may be used to better secure the safety of America. We need something more than 'looking into it.'

"There are many other urgent problems with our domestic security that are not being sufficiently addressed by the DHS: funding for first responders, port security, the lack of interoperable communications, the minimal focus on cybersecurity.

"Here are just a few examples:

1. We know that confined spaces open to the public, are most vulnerable to bio and chem attacks. We lack threat assessments and have not deployed equipment that is currently available and being installed by the Post Office, to sample air for biological agents on a 24/7 basis.
2. Some 600,000 employees at airports enter secured facilities without inspection - employees of restaurants. Are we counting on McDonalds to do the security checks for their staff...and even if they did, why subject the pilot of the plane to the metal detector but exempt the guy who flips the burgers?o:p>
3. We do not inspect, today, the cargo that comes into the nation's ports even though, as reported in the press, one of the most urgent threat scenarios is the prospect of a weapon of mass destruction entering through this means and even though we could purchase commercially available technology that would assist with tracking.
4. Most of the infrastructure that the nation relies on is in private ownership - the power grid, the water supply, the banking system and all of it is highly vulnerable to cyber attack. Yet we lack a national plan with measurable goals to move us to cyber security.
5. We have not prepared a comprehensive threat analysis so the funding we are allocating is diffused. For example, California receives a little under \$4 per capita in homeland security funding, but Wyoming receives nearly \$40 per capita. Just exactly what was it we were securing in Wyoming? And the information analysis section of the Department charged with analyzing and mapping threats has only 20 analysts currently working on it.

"Ridge has a monumental task building the Department of Homeland Security. After all, this is the largest government reorganization since the end of World War II. However, we do not have the luxury of time. We must move faster to protect our nation.

"The Bush Administration talks a good game on homeland security, but there seems to be no overall plan. This concerns me greatly. We all hope that there will not be another terrorist attack on the United States. While Americans have a better sense of the threat that exists, I believe that we are not much more prepared for an attack than we were pre 9-11 and hope just isn't good enough.

"When is it the proper time to yell out that the Emperor has no clothes? When there is still time to get him a suit.

"I point out these things because it is important that we understand the magnitude of the challenge that we face. In Congress, and as a member of the Homeland Security Committee, I have made it my goal to closely oversee the continuing development of the Department of Homeland Security. I want to make sure they are moving quickly, but also in a thoughtful way. In addition, I will push the Bush Administration to finally craft an overall homeland security plan to protect the nation, and to set goals to implement that plan.

"We are quickly approaching the second year anniversary of the September 11th tragedy. There is no excuse for the nation to be unprepared to prevent future attacks.

“Thank you, and I would be happy to take your questions at this time.”